

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 401

By Ketron

A RESOLUTION to honor the life and memory of Dr. Robert "Bob" Sanders on the occasion of the Rutherford County Health Department building being named in his honor.

WHEREAS, Dr. Robert "Bob" Sanders was an exemplary Tennessean and consummate professional who worked assiduously to improve the quality of life for his fellow citizens in numerous capacities; and

WHEREAS, because he was a champion and crusader for the health and safety of the citizens, particularly the children, of Rutherford County and the State of Tennessee, the Rutherford County Commission recently named the health department facility on Burton Street in Murfreesboro in his honor; and

WHEREAS, a Tullahoma native, Dr. Sanders was born October 24, 1927, and graduated from Castle Heights Military Academy, where he was a member of the track team, captain of the football team, and president of the senior class; he completed his undergraduate degree and medical school at Vanderbilt University and also trained at Vanderbilt (Pediatrics) and in San Francisco, California, Stockholm, Sweden, and Chapel Hill, North Carolina; and

WHEREAS, in October 1963, Dr. Sanders and his wife moved to his grandparents' farm in Rutherford County, where for many years afterward he enjoyed raising sheep, cattle, and crops; and

WHEREAS, he was a Murfreesboro pediatrician in private practice for almost three years before moving into the field of public health when, in 1969, he became director and chief physician of the Rutherford County Health Department, which he served with distinction until his retirement in 1991; and

WHEREAS, he also held the position of Rutherford County Medical Examiner from 1983 until his much-deserved second retirement in 1999; and

WHEREAS, from 1961 to 1991, Dr. Sanders was on the faculty of Vanderbilt University Medical School Department of Pediatrics; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Sanders was instrumental in the 1977 passage of the first state law requiring children to be restrained in automobiles; working with his wife, Pat, he ultimately persuaded the General Assembly to pass a child restraint law requiring children under the age of four to ride in strapped seats while in any motor vehicle; and

WHEREAS, Bob Sanders became known as “Dr. Seat Belt,” after Tennessee became the first state in the nation to adopt such a law, after which every other state in the union followed suit, as did the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico; and

WHEREAS, after successfully working with the late Representative John Bragg to introduce and pass seat belt and child restraint legislation, Dr. Bob Sanders and his wife continued to advocate against the “Babes in Arms” exemption to the child restraint law, which allowed babies and children to ride in the arms of an older person instead of being restrained in car seats or seat belts; they lobbied vigorously for four years to convince legislators of the dangers to unrestrained, vulnerable children during accidents until the exemption was finally removed in 1981; and

WHEREAS, the thousands of children who have emerged from wrecks unscathed as a result of riding in child restraint seats unquestionably owe their lives to the efforts of child safety pioneer Dr. Bob Sanders and his wife, Pat; while this gentle, soft-spoken physician might have seemed an unlikely warrior, his intelligence, tenacity, and determination propelled the State of Tennessee into a national leadership role and left Tennessee citizens, particularly Tennessee’s children, deeply in his debt; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Sanders further demonstrated his commitment to public health and safety by assisting counties in establishing infant seat loaner programs to help low-income families; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Bob Sanders and his wife also testified persuasively during public hearings about the negative environmental impact of a proposed Department of Energy’s Superconducting Super Collider project, contributing to the moving of the facility’s location from rural Rutherford County to Waxahachie, Texas, where the project was eventually abandoned by the federal government; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Bob Sanders was honored for his lobbying efforts by the Tennessee Medical Association, the Tennessee Public Health Association, the Tennessee Pediatric Society, the American Academy of Pediatrics, Safe Kids, Contemporary Pediatrics, and the Prevention Institute; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Sanders enjoyed the loving companionship of his wife of forty-three years, Patricia Pelot Sanders, and was the proud father of a son, Robert Smith Sanders, Jr., and daughter, Priscilla Pelot Sanders; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Robert Sanders was a sterling physician, farmer, pioneer, advocate, and crusader, whose passion and drive earned him the title of "Father of the Child Passenger Protection Act," and it is fitting that this General Assembly should pause to remember the legacy of this extraordinary Tennessean; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED FIFTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that we honor the life and memory of Dr. Robert Sanders, and on the occasion of the Rutherford County Health Department building being named in his honor, we reflect fondly upon his impeccable character and his stalwart commitment to living the examined life with courage and conviction.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.